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ABSTRACT

A communication instructor used research findings by African American scholars to expand the communication arts curriculum and the courses he taught. The rhetorical communication theory course at Ohio Dominican College traces the development of rhetoric from the classical period. Two primary assignments in the course are a research paper on a significant rhetorician and an oral presentation. Numerous names of African-Americans were added to the suggested list of rhetoricians. The "Mass Media in America" course's textbook was supplemented with other texts that better highlight the role of African-Americans in mass media. Contemporary African-American public speakers are used for case study in the persuasion course, which describes persuasion theory and contemporary applications of persuasion theory. The "Unity in Diversity" course is a new course that explores the implications of belonging to a culturally pluralistic society. A variety of sources by black authors relevant to the course exist. A common objective of these courses is to empower students to discover African-American contributions and share their discoveries in class. (Contains 51 references.) (RS)

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EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNICATION ARTS CURRICULUM USING AFRICAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

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EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNICATION ARTS CURRICULUM USING AFRICAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

It is speculated that by the year 2000 33% of school age children in the U.S. will be of non-European origin. Thus, we have a unique opportunity and obligation to ensure our academic curriculums are representative of these non-European perspectives. Thorough modifications will be a lengthy process. Calls for a more inclusive curriculum, representative of the multicultural composition of American society, have come from a variety of sources (Williams, 1990; Viadero, 1992; Gordon & Bhattacharyya, 1992). One frequently hears that we need emphasis on education as a means to help American society get along with itself (in the area of inter-racial/ethnic relations). Common sense supports an inclusive curriculum, representative of the subcultural groups that comprise America, that will appeal to the diverse audience educated in America today and tomorrow.

This article focuses on the use of research findings by African-American scholars to expand the communication arts curriculum. The aforementioned inclusive curriculum can obviously only be attained when scholarship representative of all American subcultures is included in curriculum expansion efforts. Emphasis on African-American scholars, within this article, is intended as one of many steps towards an inclusive curriculum. And, obviously, communication arts is but one of many disciplines to be expanded.

A review of literature on the subject of curriculum

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development and multicultural inclusiveness reveals little that deals with models for curricular development specifically in communication arts. However, much has been written on curriculum development and multicultural inclusiveness that can be applied in communication arts and other disciplines within the social sciences. Helle Bering-Jensen (1990) recommends inclusion of minority contributions in classroom content as a means of supplementing Eurocentric perspectives. Beverly Tatum (1992) offers strategies for overcoming student resistance to race related content. Emphasis on inclusion of culturally diverse works of literature is described in Pfordresher (1992) and Post (1992). Michael Harris (1992) suggests one means of addressing racial problems is to promote inclusion of African and African-American content in U.S. public schools. Kerry Feldman (1992) emphasizes how anthropology departments can be helpful in choosing multicultural education components. Jerry Gaff (1992) claims that multiculturalism has won the war against Eurocentrism and that we should move to the next step of creating inclusive programs that are educationally valuable. These views point to the need for expansion of the curriculum. Again, the focus of this article is on the inclusion of African-American scholarship as an initial objective, with the inclusion of scholarship representative of all American subcultures being the primary long term objective.

During the past quarter century many colleges and

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universities have tried to include minorities in their curriculums through the creation of African-American studies departments that stress Black contributions. It is a central premise of the Lilly Foundation grant proposal, that funded the research undertaken by this author, that "If majority students are to gain the benefits of the minority perspectives, we believe that the contributions of minorities should claim their proper place throughout the curriculum and not be relegated to a 'separate but distinct' area (Ohio Dominican College, 1991, p. 13).

The author has approached his research of African-American scholarship as an opportunity to substantively augment his academic orientation. One could merely use a recipe approach of "just add African-American readings and stir" but this would only allow for cosmetic changes. Rather, this author has approached this as he did his graduate school years. Knowledge learned is intended to become part of his theoretical fabric. Such an approach takes time and thorough analysis. His graduate training was a long indepth period of study. Any serious modifications of that foundation will come through a similar path.

The communication arts discipline covers a wide range of subject areas including public speaking, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, mass media, rhetoric, journalism, public relations, broadcasting, theater, and cross-cultural studies. The author has focused on five courses he teaches: Rhetorical Communication Theory,

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Mass Media in America, Persuasion, Communication in the Organization, and a Unity in Diversity course. A majority of the works are most appropriate in the Unity in Diversity course. Examples of course modifications will be described to exemplify how curricular change in communication arts can be perpetuated.

Before addressing specific course modifications, it will be helpful to describe the process through which this author gathered contributions of African-American scholars. Essential in this process were his visits to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. It is the "largest and the most valuable research library in America for the study of Negro life and history" and "the most comprehensive and interesting group of books by Negroes ever collected in the world" (The Arthur B. Spingarn Collection of Negro Authors, 1947, pp. 1 & 7). Such a comprehensive collection of African-American scholarship offers a unique opportunity to study African-American contributions in a variety of areas.

This author used a variety of key words to search for information relevant to communication arts. The seven most useful key words were rhetoric, communication, narration, persuasion, political oratory, nonverbal communication, and interpersonal relations. The following lists, in parentheses, the number of relevant titles found under each key word heading: rhetoric (36), communication (75), narration (71), persuasion (6), political oratory (7),

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nonverbal communication (17), and interpersonal relations (35).

Rhetorical Communication Theory is an upper-level course at Ohio Dominican College. The course traces the development of rhetoric from the classical period, to the British period, to the contemporary period. Two primary assignments in the course are a research paper on a significant rhetorician and an oral presentation in class about the rhetorician researched. The suggested list of rhetoricians includes names such as Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, Marie Nichols, Stephen Toulmin, Cicero, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. No African-Americans are included in the list. As a result, the following African-American names have been added to the list as possible rhetoricians to be studied: W.E.B. DuBois, Sterling Brown, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison. Thus, the list is more inclusive of Afrocentric perspectives.

Students choosing to study the African-American rhetoricians might use, as a foundation for their research, works such as The Anatomy of Black Rhetoric (Payne, 1982), A Comparative Study of Two Approaches for Analyzing Black Discourse (Phillips, 1983), Rhetoric of Racial Hope (Hill, 1976), The Relationship Between Errors in Standard Usage in Written Compositions of College Students and the Students' Cognitive Styles (Cooper, 1979), From Behind the Veil: A Study of African-American Narrative (Stepto, 1979), and Black Communication (Mullen, 1982). These works, authored by African-American writers, focus on African-American rhetoric.

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The Mass Media in America course uses a textbook entitled Introduction to Mass Media (Black & Bryant, 1992). It can be supplemented with Split Image (Dates and Barlow, 1990) and Mass Media in America (Pember, 1992). These works better highlight the role of African-Americans in mass media. Other sources regarding the role of African-Americans are found in an extensive bibliography entitled "Blacks in the Media: Communications Research Since 1978" (Williams, 1990), published by the Howard University Center for Communications Research.

The Persuasion course describes persuasion theory and contemporary applications of persuasion theory. One of these applications involves persuasion in public speaking. Contemporary public speakers can be used for case study analysis in the course. This is an excellent opportunity to promote inclusion of African-Americans (i.e. the Jesse Jackson address at the 1988 Democratic National Convention).

The Communication in the Organization course emphasizes communication in interpersonal, group, and organizational settings. It is suggested that one simple guideline for text selection in such a course is to analyze possible textbooks for favorable inclusion of American subcultures in case studies, examples, photographs and overall content. This guideline would obviously be beneficial when considering textbooks for other courses in the communication arts curriculum as well.

The Unity in Diversity course is a new course that was

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developed under the auspices of the aforementioned Lilly Grant. This course is team taught by Judith Abala (a black female) and Jim Schnell (a white male). This course, developed by Abala and Schnell, is an introductory course that explores the implications of belonging to a culturally pluralistic society with all of its richness, complexities, challenges and responsibilities. The course seeks to enhance the ability of students to interact with culturally different individuals who comprise American society. There is no textbook for the course. Instead, a readings booklet (comprised of many types of articles) has been compiled.

There are a variety of sources by black authors relevant for study in the Unity in Diversity course. Such references include: Handbook of Intercultural Communication (Asante, Newmark & Blake, 1979), Black and White Styles in Conflict (Kochman, 1981), Variations in Black and White Perceptions of the Social Environment (Triandis, 1976), Rappin' & Stylin' Out; Communication in Urban Black America (Kochman, 1972) and African-American Communications (Ward, 1991). These works offer perspectives on the complexities of communication among American subcultures and can be helpful in enhancing student understanding of relevant considerations.

Unity in Diversity is an experimental course at the time of this writing. It has the potential for being added to the core requirement courses required for all students.

A common objective in all of these courses, regarding inclusion of African-American perspectives, is to empower

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students to discover African-American contributions and share their discoveries in class. This allows for the individual student to learn, his/her fellow classmates to learn, and the professor to learn. This empowerment is preferable to an approach that is driven soley by the faculty member. To empower the student to learn the process for discovering African-American contribution allows for future self initiated learning by the student.

This author's visits to Howard University have provided him with an enriched learning opportunity regarding African-American perspectives and the African-American experience in America. His visits to Howard have included study in the Moorland-Spingarn Library and sitting in on classes. The Library has been essential in helping the author gain context for African-American academic contributions.

Future curricular development will benefit from increased inclusion of other subcultural perspectives. These perspectives obviously exist in the communication arts curriculum but, perhaps, not to the degree that they should. The modification process described in this article is offered as a model for future development regarding the creation of a multicultural curriculum.

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